

OLD COURT HOUSE

HABS NO.24-12

SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

St. Joseph Co

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 24

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
HERBERT W. FOLTZ, DISTRICT OFFICER
1034 Architects Building, Indianapolis

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The first court house in South Bend, a two story brick structure, was built in 1832 on the southwest corner of Main Street and Washington Avenue. This was torn down in 1854 to make room for the second court house, the subject of this survey.

The plans and estimates for the new building were submitted competitively, and a prize of twenty-five dollars offered for the best design. This was won by the architectural firm of Vanosdal and Olmstead, with John Smithmeyer the designer. The contract for the construction was awarded to Robert S. Allen of Mishawaka, Indiana, and the work was begun in 1854.

The following description of the building is quoted from the "Saint Joseph Valley Register" of April 27, 1854: "In size the new Court House is $61\frac{1}{2}$ x $91\frac{1}{2}$ feet, including the portico; two stories high, the lower one $12\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and the upper one 20 feet, surmounted by a cupola 50 feet. The stone foundation extends 33" below the ground and is carried above three feet. The lower story contains all the offices. Entering by the portico, which is on the eastern front, and supported by six pillars, you pass into a spacious hall 14 feet wide and 81 feet long, on each side of which are situated various offices. From the front of the hall, stairs rise on both sides to the second story meeting above in a lobby 13 x 27 feet from which a spacious court room 57 x 50 and 20 feet high is entered by a door in the center. About the middle of the court room a semi-circular bar separates the officers, attorneys, suitors, and witnesses from the audience. Inside the bar are the lawyers' tables, pleading table, officer's desk and witness stand. Still further back in the western extreme of the court room is the judge's bench, with the grand and petit jury box on either side in the shape of an L. In the rear of

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the court room are 3 rooms, one immediately behind the judge's bench for a witness room 12 x 17, and on each side a jury room 20 x 13, so that the juries can retire from a door opening from their seats into their consultation room without having to pass through the audience."

The plan of the second floor was altered to its present state in 1873, the well designed plan being lost, and the Greek Revival details of the old court room being superseded by Victorian Chocolate. This floor is now used to accommodate the Auten Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, and other patriotic organizations.

The building was turned around and moved to its new location in 1897 to make way for the third and present court house, and placed on a foundation nearly three times as high as its original designer intended it to be.

In 1907 the partitions were removed from the first floor, and cast iron columns installed, making one large room which has served as the Museum of the Northern Indiana Historical Society since that date. Thus we find the building today.

March 31, 1934

(Signed) George H. Sherwood
Squad Leader

Bibliography

Chapman, Charles C., "History of St. Joseph County"
1880

Saint Joseph Valley Register, April 27, 1854

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South Bend Tribune, December 18, 1897

-Approved Herbert H. Foley
DISTRICT OFFICER

Revised 1936 - H.C.F.